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Internationalisation of Higher Education Strategies in China: Using Institutional Theory and Demand-Driven Analysis

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Internationalisation of Higher Education Strategies in China: Using Institutional Theory and Demand-Driven Analysis

The term “Internationalisation of Higher Education” (IHE) stresses the “process” instead of “outcomes” in education. It integrates an international, intercultural, or global dimension to cope with the academic environment internationally. China opened its markets by joining the World Trade Organisation (WTO), which emphasises the free trade context regarding international academic mobility coming under the domain of the freely traded market. Two main forms of cooperative Transnational Education (TNE) ventures are the collaborative/joint programme and international branch campuses (IBCs). For a more comprehensive understanding of the strategy of IHE in China, the three pillars, including regulative, normative and cultural-cognitive pillars in institutional theory, can be employed as a possible framework to examine the organisations and organisational change. The three pillars offer explanations of different rationales of structures, practices and beliefs by its own mechanisms and processes. In addition, the Demand-Driven/Benefits Analysis will be used to explain the reason why these strategies are implemented. Four demand driven inputs can be evaluated from the perspective of the demands in the process of TNE, these are students’ demands, marketing demands, financial demands and social demands.

Keywords: Internationalisation of Higher Education; Institutional Theory; Demand-Driven Analysis

1. Internationalisation of Higher Education (IHE) Strategies

The term “Internationalisation of Higher Education” (IHE) stresses the “process” instead of “outcomes” in education. It integrates an international, intercultural, or global dimension to cope with the academic environment internationally. China opened its markets by joining WTO, which emphasises the free trade context regarding international academic mobility (Altbach & Knight, 2007) coming under the domain of the freely traded market (Kirp, 2003). The General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS), is part of an agreement encouraging international and service related trade in education among WTO member countries. It focuses on implementing and facilitating

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academic mobility in terms of consumption abroad (student mobility), cross-border supply (distance education and franchising degrees), commercial presence (branch campuses and joint programs), and the presence of natural persons (professors and researchers travelling abroad to provide educational services). In this paper, two main forms of cooperative Transnational Education (TNE) ventures will be introduced: collaborative/joint program and international branch campuses (IBCs). The definition of ‘collaborative/joint program’ is quite clear and stable: “Collaboration between all partners in the design and delivery of curriculum and program” (Knight, 2006). The change of definition of international branch campuses (IBCs) is worth mentioning in terms of the governance. The definition in the Observatory on Borderless Higher Education (OBHE) 2009 edition excludes “establishments where the programs offered lead only to double or joint degrees” (Becker 2009, p. 3). In 2012, however, the OBHE slightly broadened the definition in the report that an IBC is “a higher education institution that is located in another country from the institution which either originated it or operates it, with some physical presence in the host country; and which awards at least one degree in the host country that is accredited in the country of the originating institution” (Lawton & Katsomitros, 2012, p. 7). Many IBCs have a choice of whether to offer accredited degrees from the original institution and/or from the local institution depending on the acceptance of the local host government (Healey, 2015).

2. Institutional Theory

For a more comprehensive understanding of the strategy of IHE in China, the three pillars, including regulative, normative and cultural-cognitive pillars (Figure 1) in institutional theory can be employed as a possible framework. They can be used to examine the organisations and organisational change, and attempt to explain different rationales of structures, practices and beliefs by its own mechanisms and processes

(Scott, 2008; Wilkins & Huisman, 2012). The regulative pillar involves the capacity to establish rules, monitor other conformity to the rules and deliver sanctions by formal regulations or informal mechanisms. According to the Regulations of the Ministry of Education (MOE) in the People's Republic of China (PRC) with respect to Sino-Foreign Collaboration in Higher Education, the establishment of the formation of international collaborative/joint program in China is defined as Zhongwai-Hezuo-Banxue (中外合作办学 in Chinese). The term refers to “activities of the cooperation between foreign educational institutions and Chinese educational institutions in establishing educational institutions within the territory of China to provide education services mainly to Chinese citizens” (MOE, 2003, p. 1). According to Hu (2014), four crucial characteristics are contained in the concept relatively implicitly: 1) the collaborative programs should be operated between one of the Chinese higher education institutions and an institution from another country in forms of capital, intellectual property rights and etc.; 2) the collaborative programs should be run and located in China and jointly delivered by the partnering institutions in China; 3) the collaborative university in China plays the dominant role in the process of operation and the main representative body of the joint program should be Chinese; 4) the accreditation awarded by the collaborative institutions can be foreign degrees and/or Chinese degrees.

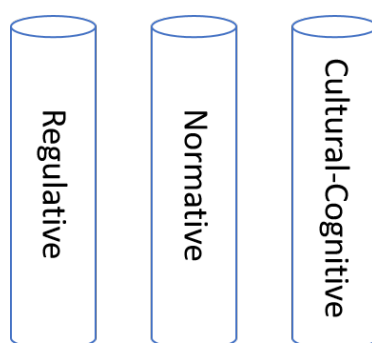


Figure 1. Three Pillars of Institutional Theory in China's IHE Context

The focus of the normative pillar is that practitioners adapt to the rules of higher education institutions rather than being slaves to obeying the social conventions (Searing, 1991). The Confucian model is prevalent in China and in order to promote the practice of Confucianism, MOE in China has nominated the “211 Project Universities” (the 100 leading universities in China) and “Project 985 Universities” (top universities with research excellence) to promote an “innovation society” plan in education. By fostering achievement in its educational innovation goals, China offers the opportunity for importing quality educational resources by establishing joint programs and joint universities under the dominance of Chinese government. According to Cuiming, Feng and Henderson (2012), most joint programs offer undergraduate level courses with the models of 1+3, 2+2, 3+1 and 4+0 (the first number is the study year/years in China and the second number is the study year/years in foreign countries). As long as the students meet the following conditions: 1) having successfully accomplished the required years of academic study in the Chinese university of the collaborative program, 2) achieving the certain language proficiency tests, such as IELTS, TOFEL, or PET, to the required level by the foreign partner, and 3) successfully fulfilling all the requirements during the study in the foreign partner university, then they can eventually be awarded the bachelor’s degree by the Chinese institution or the foreign higher institution in collaboration. As for postgraduate joint programs (master level and doctoral level or equivalent), it can take half of their academic years’ time studying abroad or even be fully undertaken overseas. Therefore, the boundaries of innovation and convention rules overlap and reinforce each other.

Whereas the first two pillars are concerned with the regulations, rules and norms, the culture-cognitive pillar is more associated with the social reality, social frames and cultures (Scott, 2008, p. 57; Peng et al., 2009, p. 64). The power of political control of the government is in the Chinese Communist Party’s (CCP) hand. According to Imagining Better Education: Conference Proceedings 2018

Onsman and Cameron (2014), one particular phenomenon worth mentioning is that in the joint university program (a form of IBC) between the University of Nottingham and Zhejiang Wanli University (ZWU) – University of Nottingham Ningbo, China (UNNC), the Student Affairs Office is dedicated to ensuring political control of the students at the University in compliance with the Archives Law in China. The Student Affairs Office will play an important role in gathering detailed information on the political Party affiliation status (Zhengzhi-Mianmao) of the students' families and social groups. Besides the Student Affairs Office, the leading team, has the responsibility and accountability for all sorts of major issues of emergency and security. Another fact that is worth noticing is that after the first month of the academic year in September, students in the university are always positively encouraged to join CCP by being an active member in the pool (Jiji-Fenzi). Loyalty to the Party is rewarded with exclusive opportunities and positive notes on their records. On that account, the joint programs and universities in China are under observation by the subordinate body of the CCP in the context of socialism with Chinese characteristics (Zhongguo-Tese-Shehui-Zhuyi).

3. Demand-Driven/Benefits Analysis

If the institutional theory has identified the implicit strategies of IHE in China, then the Demand-Driven/Benefits Analysis is the reason why these strategies are implemented. The international education service providers are inclined to enter China's massive higher education market, and the establishment of the partnership of Collaborative/joint programs and IBCs have several benefits for students who are planning to study abroad. Four driving demands, or inputs, can be evaluated from the perspective of the demands in the process of TNE, these are: students' demands, marketing demands, financial demands and social demands (Gide, Wu & Wang, 2010). Figure 2 illustrates the Demand-Driven Input-Output Benefit Model of IHE in China.

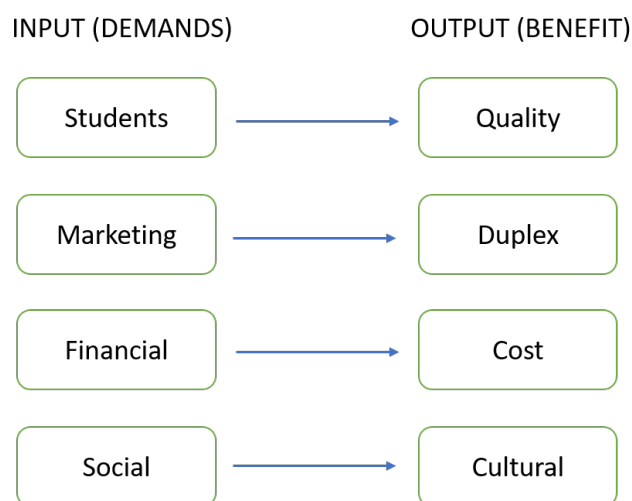


Figure 2. The Demand-Driven Input-Output Benefit Model of IHE in China

1) Students' Demands. Students desire to obtain an international qualification and the most advanced skills and training, in order to enhance their competitive capacity in their career development. This would lead to better opportunities and a better future life.

However, this has the adverse effect of putting pressure on IHE in China to promote and keep up-to-date with the latest and optimized "westernised" curriculum, teaching and learning materials and teaching methodologies. This is achieved by incorporating collaborative/joint programs into China's Higher Education system (Liang, 2004).

2) Marketing Demands. China's higher education provision is undertaking a transformation from a one-way outflow in 2000, to a globalised two-way education market in the present. There has been more than a decade of history of Chinese students and scholars studying abroad and the number of people studying abroad is growing rapidly; for example, in 2003, the total number of students and scholars studying abroad was about 117 thousand (MOE, 2009), whereas in 2015, the number had reached to 397.6 thousand in total (CCG, 2016). The main reasons for the massive marketing demand can be contributed to TNE of IHE in China; the cooperation of the Sino-foreign education venture has offered opportunities for Chinese students to receive overseas

higher education inside the home country and in the meantime, it may also attract students from overseas to study in China.

3) Financial Demands. Expensive tuition fees and living fees may hinder prospective students from traveling to the main exporting countries for education (Verbik and Lasanowski 2007); nevertheless, with the emergence of joint programs and IBCs, the cost barrier may be removed. It provides an opportunity for those students who are planning to enter and experience the student life of higher educational institutions in foreign countries but cannot afford to do so. Not only can students reduce the costs of transportation and living in a foreign country, but it also lowers the costs of obtaining an international qualification with a reduction of the tuition fees of up to 75% (Liang, 2004). Also, students will have a greater opportunity to engage in part-time jobs while studying in their home country.

4) Social Demands. TNE study is often more flexible and convenient, it reduces disruption and avoids tearing the family, work and study life apart by prolonged absence abroad. Also, from an academic point of view, teaching staff can experience additional international teacher training and teaching opportunities by participating in the TNE programs which provide opportunities for collaboration with local academics. Likewise, students can also benefit from the status of being internationally competitive and having an international profile while carrying out studies as part of the prestigious TNE programs.

4. Conclusion

In summary, the article has introduced the development of the TNE program in the process of IHE. China opened its market in the world by joining WTO, which promotes the development of collaborative partnerships and programs with foreign higher

education institutions. Then the article has interpreted IHE Strategies by employing three pillars in institutional theory (regulative, normative and cultural-cognitive pillars) and the four demand/driven benefits model (students' demands, marketing demands, financial demands and social demands). Future research could focus on the opportunities and challenges of the IHE Strategies in China.

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